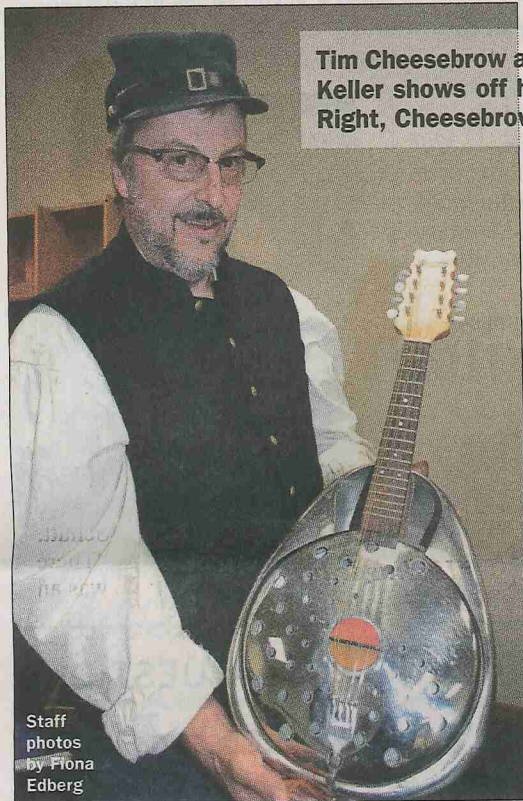


Blue Earth Community Library welcomes The Skally Line



Tim Cheesebrow and Fred Keller have been playing together for about two years. Left, Keller shows off his commodium, which was repurposed out of a bedpan (unused). Right, Cheesebrow and Keller play some tunes in the Blue Earth Community Library.



Staff photos by Fiona Edberg

The band brings stories of Minnesota's history to life through music

By FIONA EDBERG
Register Staff Writer

History class sometimes gets a bad rap for spewing a litany of names, dates, and dusty old documents upon its reluctant students. However, The Skally Line band is looking to change that reputation with the power of song.

The Skally Line, comprised of members Fred Keller and Tim Cheesebrow, is a two-man band dedicated to making history come alive through story telling and music from centuries past.

They put on one of their historically-steeped performances for an audience at the Blue Earth Community Library on July 14 at 1 p.m.

The performance was underwritten by the Legacy Amendment passed by the Minnesota state government to fund programs preserving Minnesota's history and cultural heritage.

"We pair stories of Minnesotan history with song," explains Cheesebrow. "It is a niche we fill in the musical tapestry."

Keller says a wide range of genres from that tapestry influence The Skally Line's musical style.

"We play old time music that predates blue grass," Keller shares. "We are influenced by old-time Appalachian music, blues, Tin Pan Alley, and everything before the 40s."

Keller's passion for musical history pairs perfectly with his passion for stories from the past. He enjoys, as he puts it, "bopping around Minnesotan history and enjoying myself."

The band's name is emblematic of that passion. Keller explains the name

"The Skally Line" is inspired by another relic of Minnesotan history: a railroad line with an interesting past.

"The Skally Line was an old train line that ran from a neighborhood in Saint Paul, called Swede Hollow, where many Swedes settled in the nineteenth century," Keller relates. "There was a railroad running through the neighborhood that went up to Duluth."

That railroad, according to Keller, was commonly called "The Skally Line." Keller simply thought the title seemed like a neat name for a band.

Keller and Cheesebrow enjoy experimenting with the recesses of Minnesotan history. However, they also

experiment with musical sound.

They shared an unusual instrument with their audience on Wednesday: a mandolin made out of a metal bedpan.

"It's called a commodium," said Keller with a twinkle in his eye. "Don't worry, it's never been used."

Apart from the instrument's original appeal, Keller and Cheesebrow explain it also produces a unique sound.

"The metal makes the commodium project more," says Cheesebrow, demonstrating a few notes. "It has more of a bright and tinny sound."

Both Keller and Cheesebrow love to teach audiences about styles of music

and Minnesotan history. They have applied their passion to an additional program called "Sounds of Minnesota."

"We visit schools to teach history through the sounds of music," explains Cheesebrow. He adds, "It's not just a performance. We also create lesson plans."

Whether they are performing for a scholastic

audience or a more leisurely one, Keller and Cheesebrow enjoy highlighting the nooks and crannies of history for their audience.

"We tell stories of unsung heroes in Minnesotan history," says Keller. "We like to sing about people who aren't represented in history books."

This makes for a fasci-

nating ride through history when spending an hour hearing about a Civil War soldier from Fairmont who wrote many letters to his wife and children, and a man who biked miles to his job in Saint Paul every day in the hopes of saving up for a Ford Model T car. Who knew history could be so fun?



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